ISSN 0712-7774

CEREBUS

RICK'S STORY

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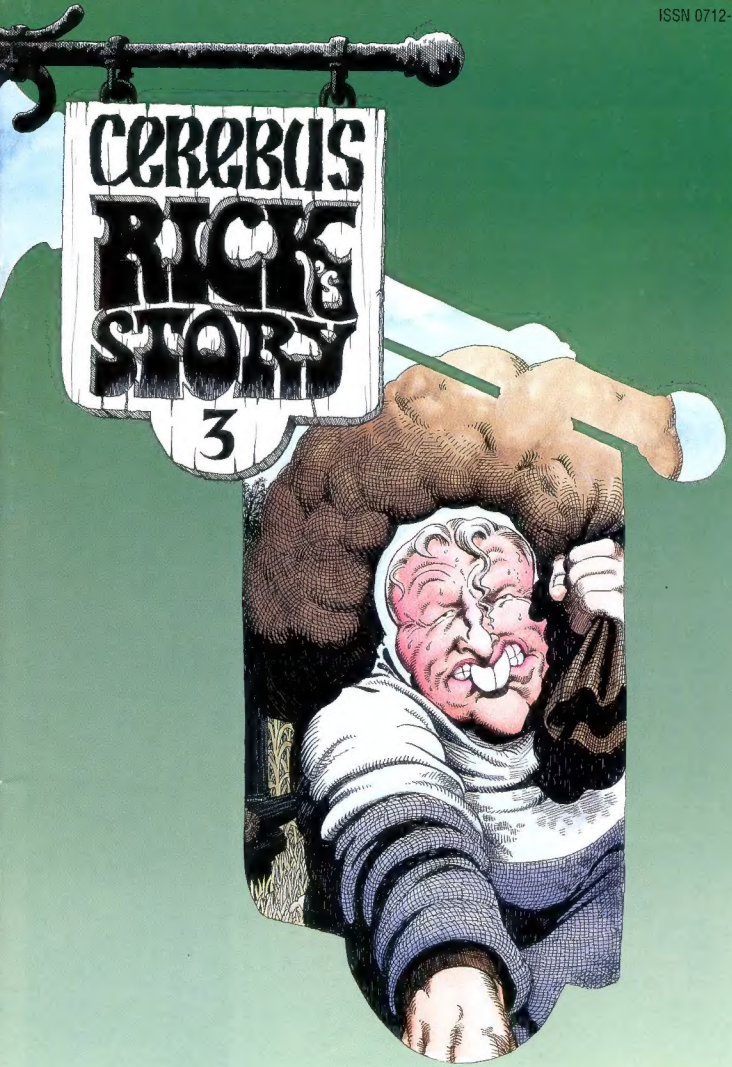

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222
SEP

E X C E R P T

It's hard to tell what brave people think. Courage is almost like a sixth directing sense, and I think sometimes that their judgements and decisions wait on its dictates. I hadn't been back to America the winter that Lou was getting her divorce, but stories of a desperate sort of dissipation slid down the back of the leather cushions in the bar chairs of pompous ocean liners and reached Paris like a new edition of the *Arabian Nights*. It must have been hard, selling all that mess of pottage for a birthright, and Lou probably went through some pretty nightmarish times. Of course she was dancing all the time in a big hit and she didn't have to be eternally fabricating complex philosophical reasons for why she cared about the things she liked.

When she came back to France she seemed taciturn, but Lou was always that way, as if she was afraid of what ecstatic sounds might escape that primitive throat of hers. To my mind, people never change until they actually look different, so I didn't find her greatly modified. She missed the baby terribly. I suppose we always feel a deep regret for the things we leave behind incompleted, but it is a regret inextricably mixed with human disappointment at human imperfections and fastens itself to one thing in the past as readily as to another. She had never seen much of the child.

I saw her when she was passing through Paris, filling up her trunks like an engine drawing water. One day I found her helpless in the hands of two dressmakers. They were sticking mouthfuls of pins into her, and all about her feet were the white lights and deep apricot folds of gold satin. She stood there as rigid as a lighthouse, and I wondered vaguely where those fine muscles came from. Suddenly I remembered stories of a past trailing away over the water under ripe Hawaiian moons, doubling over itself like a game of hare and hounds about half the army posts of the Western world. She must have been brought up on baking horseback trails and bamboo verandas and swims miles long in fruitful Southern waters — a good school of unrest for adventurous, restless spirits.

"Well, Lou, or Brünhilde, or whatever your name is, what do you intend to do now?"

"I am going to work so hard that my spirit will be completely broken, and I am going to be a very fine dancer," she answered, trying to look as if she saw visions. "I have a magnificent contract in a magnificent casino on the Côte d'Azur, and I am now on my way to work and make money magnificently."

Last issue's Excerpt:
Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*

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RICK'S STORY

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(Cerebus 220 to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
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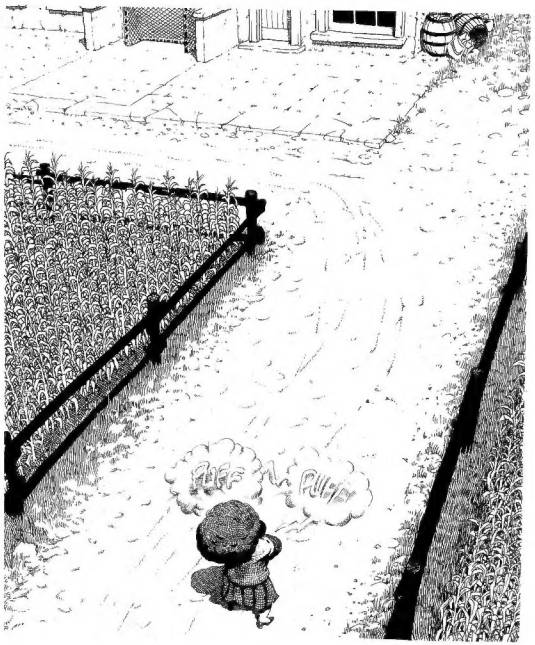


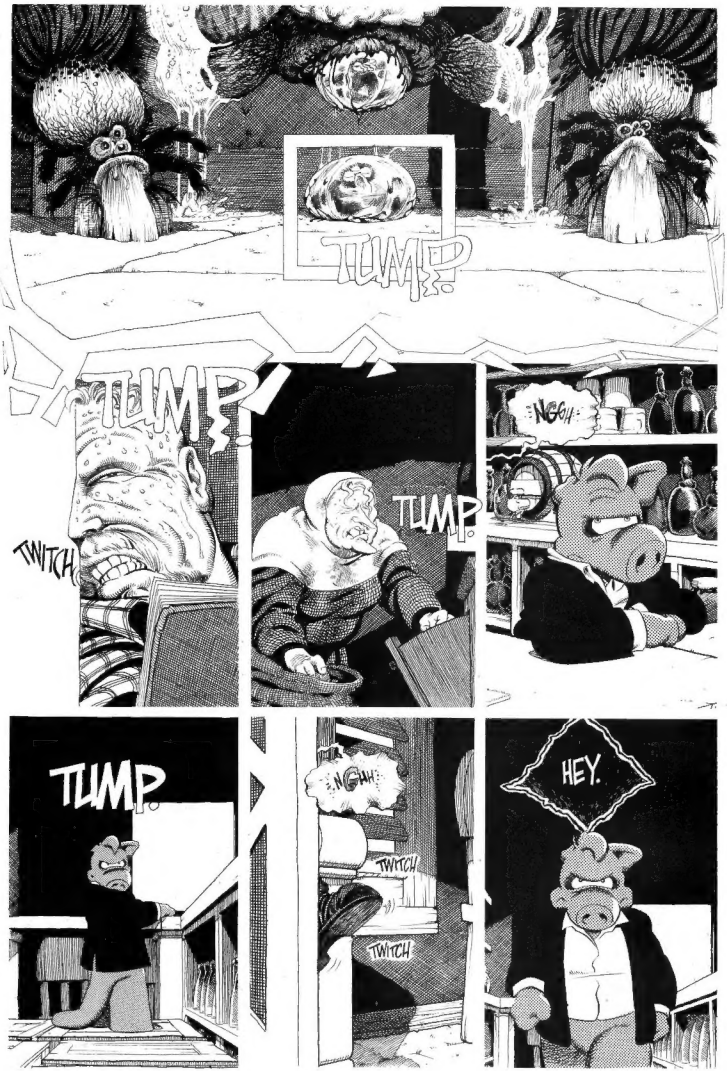
SHIT
THAT HOT WATER FELT GOOD THIS MORNING
TWO MORE DAYS.
MAYBE CEREBUS SHOULD JUST
TWO. MORE. DAYS.
NOT SO LOUD. CEREBUS CAN HEAR CEREBUS JUST FINE
CEREBUS IS TRYING TO WEASEL OUT OF LEAVING!!
IT SO LOUD" HE SAYS...
SO?! DOES CEREBUS WANT TO GROW OLD AND DIE HERE?
NAY! CEREBUS IS LEAVING IN TWO. DAYS.
AYE - UP TO HIS NECK IN NICE... HOT ... WATER.
AYE. NAY!
AYE. NAY!
LISTEN - CEREBUS HAS TO
SHUT UP... CEREBUS IS GIVING CEREBUS A HEADACHE...
BUT CEREBUS HASN'T SAID ANYTHING YET
WHATEVER CEREBUS SAYS, IT WILL GIVE CEREBUS A HEADACHE
LOOK - ALL CEREBUS IS SAYING IS: CEREBUS IS WAITING FOR BEAR TO COME BACK. RIGHT?
AYE AYE
WELL IF BEAR COMES BACK, HE'S GOING TO FIND CEREBUS LIVING WITH GIRLY-BOY
BACK THERE. RIGHT?
AYE AYE AYE
GIRLY-BOY WHO ALSO HAPPENS TO BE TAMMI'S EX-HUSBAND BEAR MET WHEN CEREBUS SENT HIM TO GET
GAGD!
THAT'S RIGHT!!
SHIT!
NOW:
WHAT IS BEAR GOING TO SAY WHEN HE FINDS CEREBUS LIVING WITH
WELL CEREBUS WAS RIGHT!
ABOUT WHAT?
CEREBUS JUST GAVE CEREBUS A HEADACHE.
AYE. AYE. AYE.
POW
POW
POW
CEREBUS WILL TELL BEAR THAT IT WAS A "JOKE"!
AND THEN BEAR AND CEREBUS CAN BEAT GIRLY-BOY TO DEATH AND TIE ROCKS AROUND HIM AND THROW HIM IN THE RIVER
!?!
HMMMM
OH, GREAT ... AND THEN CEREBUS IS THE SAME AS HENDERSON -- AND GIRLY-BOY IS THE SAME AS CEREBUS
HUH?! HUH?! HUH?!
...JUST PRETENDING TO BE GIRL
PRETENDING TO BE RICK'S FRIEND UNTIL BEAR COMES BACK, THEN DROPPING RICK LIKE A... HOT POTATO
JUST THE WAY HENDERSON DROPPED
CEREBUS
CEREBUS
CEREBUS
THAT WAS THE REASONABLE PART OF CEREBUS' MIND
WASN'T IT
UH-HUH.
CEREBUS WAS AFRAID OF THAT

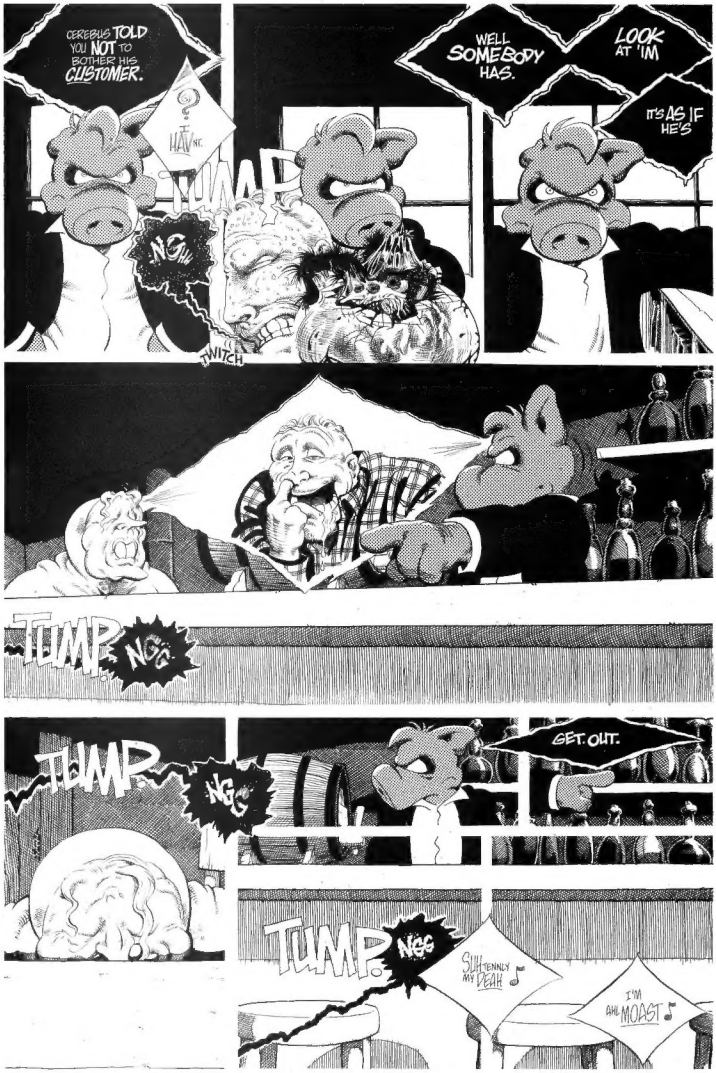
OH, CERTAINLY.. AND I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING ELSE! YOUR FRACTURING MY ARM DISTRACTED ME!
RIGHT AFTER: "LIKE SO MANY BEAUTIFUL WOMEN, SHE KNEW LOVE ONLY AS A COMMODITY, AS A MEANS, AS A LEVER, AS A RESOURCE AND AS A CONVEYANCE -- BUT WAS IGNORANT OF LOVE'S SPIRITUALITY
"AS -- INDEED -- OF SPIRITUALITY OF ANY SORT."
I CAN'T RECALL WHAT I HAD INTENDED TO COME NEXT -- ONLY THAT IT WAS A WONDERFUL PARAGRAPH ...
I FEEL YOU STARING AT ME -- WILLING ME TO LOSE MY WAY IN TRICK'S STORY" -- WILLING ME TO FAIL
JUST AS YOU FAILED IN THE PAPACY.
HA! THAT BANKS THE FIRES OF YOUR INCOHERENT RAGE, DOESN'T IT.. YOU DON'T LIKE TO BE REMINDED OF YOUR PAPAL FAILURES
DO YOU..
HA HA HA YOU CAN CALL FORTH AS MANY OF YOUR INFERNAL PEERS AS YOU LIKE
WHAT ARE THEY TO ME, BUT MANIFESTATIONS OF YOUR PAPAL FAILURES MADE FLESH?
CAN YOUR LIES TORMENT MY TRUTH?
I THINK NOT, FALLEN POPE..
I THINK NOT.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND.
I DON'T HATE YOU.
I PITY YOU.
TRUE. YOU HAVE FRACTURED MY ARM
YOU'VE EVEN DISTRACTED ME FROM MY STORY... BUT!
MY PHYSICAL INJURY WILL HEAL.
ANOTHER PARAGRAPH WILL SUGGEST ITSELF
THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT IS REALLY AT ISSUE HERE -- THAT YOU ARE BEING DISPLACED -- THAT TARIM HAS A NEW CHOSEN ONE

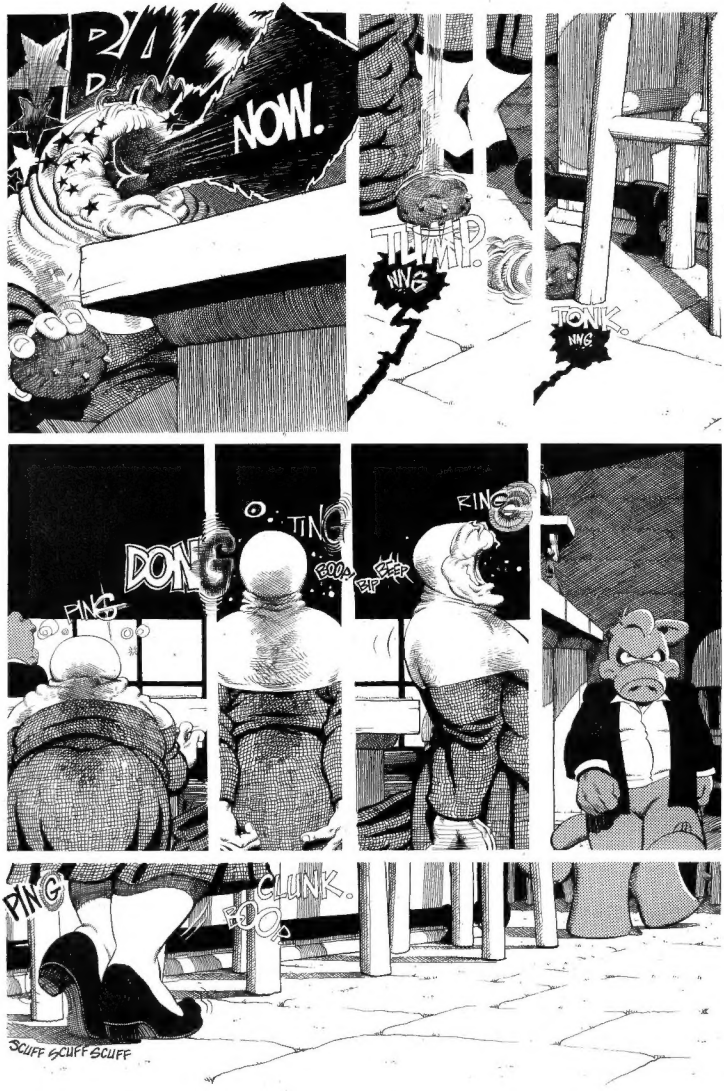
WE BOTH KNOW
THE LIVING TARIM GUIDED ME HERE FOR A REASON
AND IT WAS NOT
I ASSURE YOU
TO BE VEXED AND TROUBLED BY MALIGNANT PIXIES
BY TARIM'S SWORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS DO I CAST THEM INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS AND IN HIS NAME COMMAND THEM THAT THEY TROUBLE ME NO MORE
AMEN.
NOW -- FALLEN POPE -- LEAVE ME TO MY WORK
UNLESS
YOU HAVE (AT YOUR COMMAND) ONE OF THE INFINITY SERPENT'S EVEN MORE --
KLIK KLAK

OH! IT'S YOU.
LISTEN
DON'T JUST DUMP THE POTATOES IN THIS TIME--- IT SQUISHES THE ONES ON THE BOTTOM...
BOOBLY BOOPPY
PIFF
IT SHAWN'T PIFF HOPPEN AGAYNE
BREAK MR NASH'S LEFT THUMB
AND DON'T BOTHER CEREBUS CUSTOMER!
HE'S WRITING!

YASS...
OF COSS
BREAK
MUSH
CHATTER CHATTER
TWITCH
TWITCH
TWITCH
SNIFF
SNIFF
SQUEEKA SQUEEK
TWITCH TWITCH

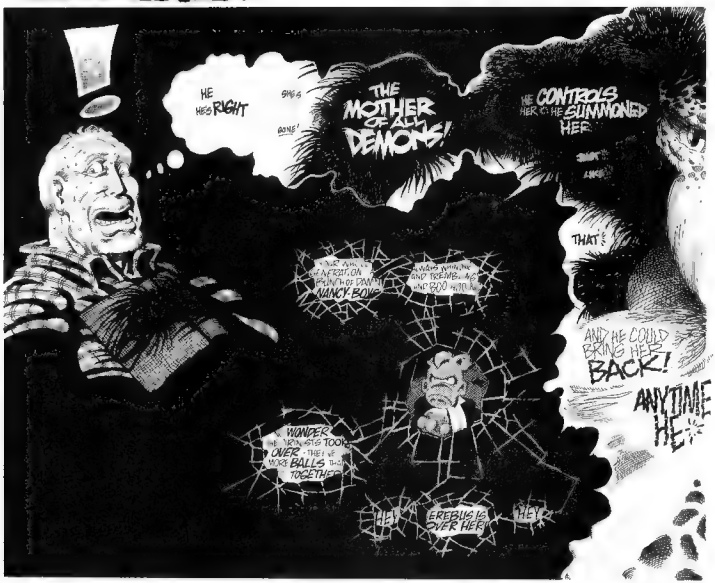

TUMP?
TUMP!
TWITCH
TUMP.
NGGH
TUMP.
HEY.
NGH
TWITCH
TWITCH

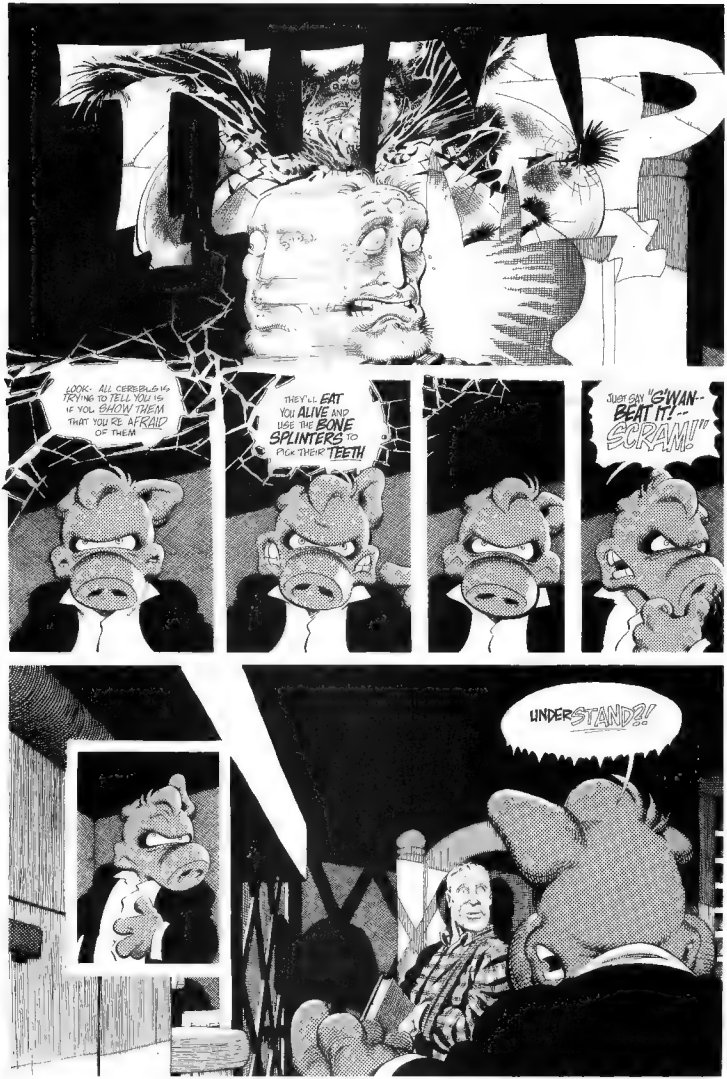

CEREBUS TOLD YOU NOT TO BOTHER HIS CUSTOMER.
I HAV NT.
NGH
TUMP
WELL SOMEBODY HAS.
LOOK AT 'IM
IT'S AS IF HE'S
TWITCH
TUMP
NGH
TUMP
NGH
GET OUT.
TUMP
NGH
SUH-TENNLY MY DEAH
I'M AHL MOAST


BAG
NOW.
THUMP.
NNG
TONK.
NNG
DONG
TING
FOOP
BIP
BEEP
RING
PING
CLUNK.
FOOP
SCUFF SCUFF SCUFF

BOOP
PING
BIP BEEP
STOP.
SCUFF SCUFF SCUFF SCUFF SCUFF
DING?
BIP BEEP
FFFF
PLIK
TIK
POINK
THHENK YAH MY DEAH.
NOW! BEFAH I LEAVE -- IS THERE ENNATHING WHICH YOU RRRE
SLAM!

IT'S OKAY?
SHE'S GONE
N
R REALLY?
IF CEREBUS SAYS SHE'S GONE, SHE'S GONE
OPEN UP YOUR STUPID-ASS EYES AND LOOK!
LISTEN "MISTER TRUTH"--CEREBUS IS SOME TRUTH R YOU--RIGHT?
YOU'RE A PUSSY
LIKE I'D CALL THEM IN THE ARN A GIRLY-BOY!

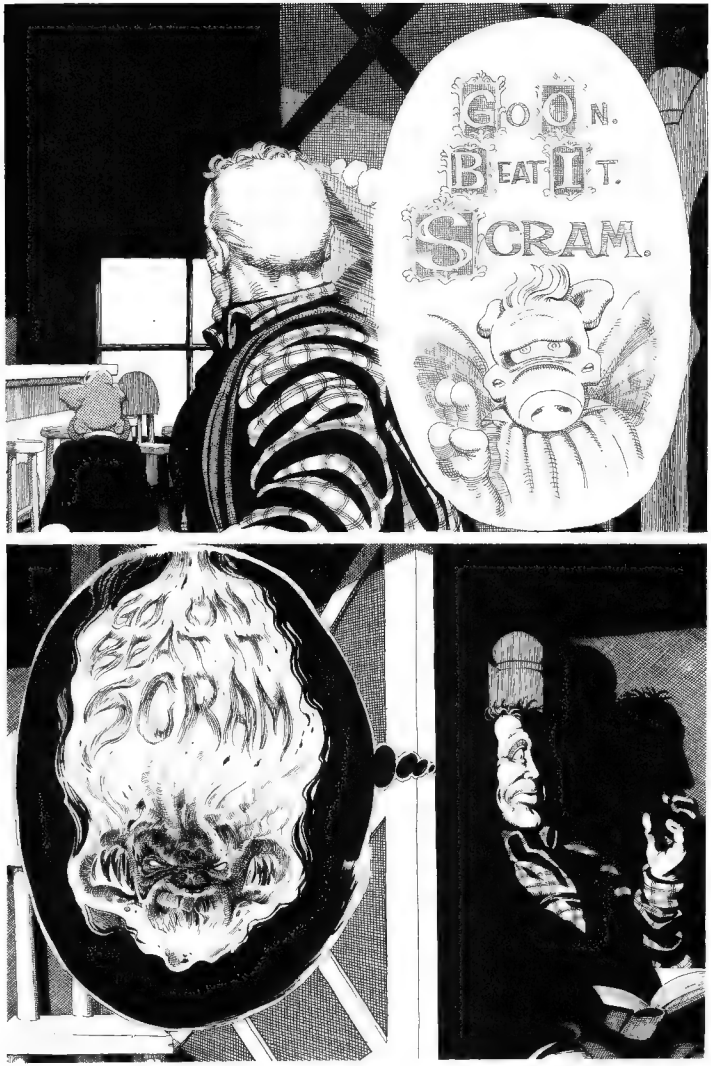

HE WAS RIGHT
SHE'S BONE!
THE MOTHER OF ALL DEMONS!
HE CONTROLS HER! HE SUMMONED HER!
THAT'S
AND HE COULD BRING HER BACK!
ANYTIME HE
I WONDER IF WE COULD TAKE HIM AND TEAR HIS ARMS OFF AND BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH THEM!
I WONDER IF WE COULD TAKE HIM AND TEAR HIS ARMS OFF AND BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH THEM!
I WONDER IF WE COULD TAKE HIM OVER. THEN I'D HAVE BALLS TOO!
HE! CEREBUS IS OVER HERE!
HEY!

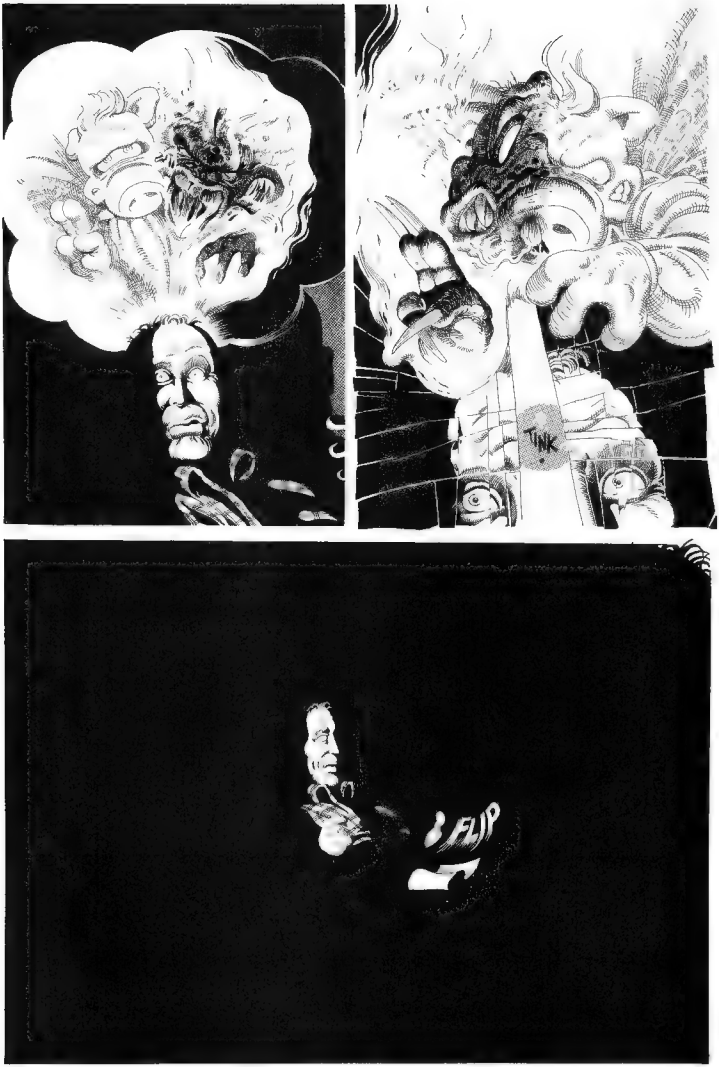

TAP
LOOK- ALL CERBERUS IS TRYING TO TELL YOU IS IF YOU SHOW THEM THAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF THEM
THEY'LL EAT YOU ALIVE AND USE THE BONE SPLINTERS TO PICK THEIR TEETH
JUST SAY "G'WAN-- BEAT IT! -- SCRAM!"
UNDERSTAND?!

GO ON BEAT IT
SCRAM
AYE

AYE
ROCK UNDERSTANDS
INSTEAD YOU SIT THERE TWITCHING
AND... AND?
OH!
WELL!
uhhmm.
WELL GOOD!
!
IN THAT CASE
TAKE OFF.
THE SLING

YOUR ARM...
...IS NOT...
BROKEN.


GO ON.
BEAT IT.
SCRAM.
GO ON BEAT IT SCRAM


TINK
FLIP

SHE CONSIDERED herself to be a strong person. Her admiration for literature was confined to strong heroines. Her every conversation led — inevitably, as night follows day — to what she regarded as the irrefutable fact of her strength. To be in her company was to be faced with the unenviable choice of verbally sharing her admiration of her own strength at regular intervals or being cast out by the failure to do so. Women who failed to share her admiration of her strength were dismissed for their "jealousy" of it — men for their weakness in being "threatened" by it.

As a member of her ever-diminishing circle of friends, I saw her less and less frequently. We all felt a great love for her, first and primarily. It was an inexplicable kind of love. In conversation with one of the permanently exiled — the "jealous" and the "threatened" — we could only squirm in our places when the conversation turned to the Empress (as she was known). Wicked anecdotes about her more excessive exhibitions of her strength were a cause for great hilarity among the permanently exiled — and many were the evenings I spent smiling thinly reduced to shrugging and making other diffident gestures as all eyes turned to me, challenging me to mount some manner of defense of my absent friend. How else to voice the inexplicable love at the center of our friendship?

If I had been forced to give an answer — and pain of death would not have dragged it from me — it would have been that I loved her for the person I caught glimpses of behind her iron mask of "strength." As the glimpses grew less frequent, it became a struggle to keep my love for her from eroding into compassion for the loneliness and isolation she brought on herself.

Finally, her perception of her own strength consumed her, mask and all. The intervals at which her friends were compelled to share in the admiration of her strength grew more frequent. On our last evening together in some tavern or other — after the third or fourth such interval had arrived with our latest round of drinks — I asked the question I had been framing for some weeks, if not months.

"But strength in service to what? In the name of what? To what purpose? And in the achievement of what end?"

Her eyes darkened as I had seen them darken so many times before.

"Get out," she said.

"This is a public place," I might have said. "I have as much right to be here as you do." As was always the case with her, suitable rejoinders flooded in a cascade through my mind. "I'm staying. Which do you think would require the greater strength on your part, *given* that I'm staying? For you to stay or for you to leave?"

But in that moment, like a knife in my heart, I realized that as love can erode into compassion, compassion can crumble into pity.

Without another word between us, I did what she had told me to do.

I never saw her again.

LET'S SEE NOW: MERCENARY -- THEN FREELANCE -- THEN KITCHEN STAFF SUPERVISOR -- THEN MERCENARY AGAIN -- THEN RANKING DIPLOMATIC IDIOT -- THEN CANDIDATE -- THEN PRIME MINISTER -- THEN HOUSE GUEST -- THEN PRIME MINISTER AGAIN
THEN POPE
THEN DRUNKARD THEN HOUSE GUEST AGAIN -- THEN ZOMBIE THEN FUGITIVE THEN DRUNKARD THEN
THEN EAR-CUT-OFF-GUY -- THEN JUNO-GUY
THEN DRUNKARD AGAIN, THEN DRUNKARD-BARTENDER, THEN DRUNKARD BARTENDER-BOYFRIEND
AND NOW: DRUNKARD-BARTENDER-EX-BOYFRIEND-BABYSITTER
OH WE ARE MAKING SOME REAL PROGRESS HERE--
OH, YES INDEED-DO
SHUT UP
HEY-YOU SHUT UP
WHO'RE YOU TELLING TO SHUT UP?
CEREBUS IS TELLING YOU TO SHUT UP
LOOK--THIS IS THE REASONABLE PART OF CEREBUS!
SHUT UP
NOW HOW ARE WE GOING TO MAKE ANY PROGRESS IF

AARDVARK COMMENT

Dear Dave,

I have this sneaking, sinking suspicion that a year has passed since I last wrote to say hi. I would push it to one side, but it has that stink of truth (insert various forms of capitalization here) about it, so I can't get too close. I wouldn't mention it, but such remissness (actually a word) seems just rude. Unless you just didn't notice or care, in which case...

I've been enjoying recent developments in *Cerebus*; the story has taken some interesting turns with Bear's departure, Joanne's arrival (and departure), and Rick's return. And the slightly different take on the nature of the common monogamous relationship has been quite enjoyable. Even more enjoyable, though, has been the growth of your use of thought balloons and layout. The internal dialog that you have been conducting in Cerebus' head of late has been most accomplished. By pushing the normal boundaries of comics, you have reproduced the multitude of voices that I, at least, find typical of day-to-day thinking. Other writers of prose and producers of film who have been willing to stretch and break the norms of their media have arrived at similar results (though through different means), but comics seem particularly well suited for such work, and you've done quite well at using the medium to effect that end. I look forward to seeing what the new untitled book will hold.

On the issue of your depiction of romantic relationships, I have to say that, much as you have in the past, you really have hit the nail on the head. Everyone has focused on your 186 depiction of male-female relationships, with male lights having their brains leeched by female voids. But as some have noted, in *Church & State*, you presented the mirror image of that depiction — male voids manipulating and controlling female lights (at least, that was the judge's judgment). In my life, I have seen guys essentially telling their girlfriends what their girlfriends should think and controlling their girlfriends' lives. I have also seen women doing the same to men. I have seen those men and women compromising themselves and their principles to maintain relationships, sometimes I've seen all that in the same relationship, and then I see Cerebus and Joanne, and I think: yes, that's it. And then I wonder as I have so often in the past: what the fuck are people thinking? Are they thinking at all? Everyone's so busy playing the game that they never think to flip over the top of the box, read the rules, and wonder whether the game should be played at all (or at least whether it should be played as the rules seem to have decreed). So much irrationality would shock me if I could find any lingering evidence of rationality in the rest of the way people live (on the other hand, I am continually fascinated and entertained, if also annoyed, by the irrationality). It's a crazy mess, and I've enjoyed the small corner of it you've depicted.

Relatedly, it is amazing how 186 and its attendant comments are still generating discussion. On a *Cerebus* e-mailing list of which I am a member, someone new to the list just reached *Reads* and got the whole list going through the same dialog that occurred when the infamous issue arrived in stores, and it amazed me how much of it was the same discussion. Is Dave a misogynist or merely a sexist? What does he really think? He can't really mean what he says? Yes, he can. It's all a bunch of bitter or poorly reasoned or whatever crap anyway, so ignore it, and on and on. By now, you must have heard or read or thought it all yourself.

And all I can think is: does it really matter, even if you truly hated all women, wanted them out of politics and the business world, and wished them all back in the house, silent and obedient? Isn't the point really to get people talking and thinking about something that they might not otherwise consider at all? And even if that isn't the point, it all came up in the context of a story, and, in stories, authors write all kinds of things. So, ultimately, I'm not sure I care what you as a person think, at least in the context of the story, because in that context all I care about is whether all the pieces fit and make for something original and challenging and fun (which is what I, at least, think art ought to be), and everyone else seems so focused on arguing about your arguments and trying to figure out what you meant and think that they seem almost wholly unconcerned with the work itself. It bothered me then, and it bothers me now.

For instance, even though it wasn't actually in *Reads* nor wholly original, the discussion between artist and creation in *Minds* was fascinating and enjoyable. It was a very nice modernist piece about the relationship between artist and creation: the way the creation can and does independently inhabit the artist's mind, confounding the artist's expectations and forcing itself into tangibility.

Additionally, the increasing separation of words and pictures throughout *Reads* has been a continuing source of thought.

And no one really congratulated you on interjecting such serious subject matter into a medium in which pituitary cases still battle each other in long underwear (which isn't to say that such battles can't be quite enjoyable... *Kingdom Come* was a real blast). All the discussion was so centered on accusing you of having written bad thoughts or defending you or trying to explain you that no one seemed to stop to say: I can't believe he wrote that in a *comic book*.

Nor did anyone seem concerned with asking whether you perhaps had a point. I apologize for continually mentioning Nietzsche in my letters, but I think he had some original thoughts in the area; to him, the Christianizing and femminizing of society were two facets of a single process of value formation, and now, just as

people have forever been unwilling to engage in a serious discussion of whether the effect of Christianity on values has been beneficial (which is different from whether Christians themselves have always been nice), few are willing (in a non-Rush-Limbaugh-like manner) to discuss whether the effect of feminism on values has been beneficial, and I don't mean that we should wonder whether the decision of increasing numbers of women to work has damaged the family structure (about which I care not at all), but whether the elevation of emotion over reason that feminism has helped to reinforce is actually a good thing. Whether you intended that as one point of *Reads* or not, that is one of the points I took away from it, and one that I think is worth real discussion, and I think people could discuss it completely apart from such questions as whether men are more naturally rational than women, or whether women should be treated as equals in private life or the workplace or politics. I still think that all of the social and political goals of feminism are legitimate for individual women: they should be allowed entry into any sphere they wish to enter, given some help to get into some that have been historically closed, and judged on their performances once they're there. In my experience, people generally underuse their capacity for reason, not just women, so treating them unequally, which is different from treating them differently, on the basis of something as arbitrary as gender, is utterly ludicrous to me, and that is entirely unrelated to whether feminism's argument for more emotion has been beneficial.

Plus, I think it was brave of you to risk alienating part of your readership (= livelihood) to raise questions that we would prefer to ignore.

And yet no one seems to want to discuss such things. Hmmm ...

On a lighter note, your comments on TV stirred up quite a bit of discussion on that same list. Some defended TV as a legitimate form of art and entertainment with some good and some bad work, just like any medium. They then, of course, listed the shows they thought were good. Others admitted such a possibility, but stated in no uncertain terms that all those shows were crap. Still others said that it wasn't art and just plain sucked (which of course got some people going on just what the definition of art is), and then there were those who had given up TV altogether and had true testimony about how their lives had improved because of it (they all seemed to be writing, reading, listening to music, and visiting with friends ... some fun). I find the latter to be like people who are involved in 12-step programs: they couldn't control their habits or accept the thing for itself, and so they now have to condemn the thing and look with disdain on those who still make sensible use of it ... there's just no talking to some people.

Also interesting was someone's comment about recent changes in Cerebus' penmanship. He noted that the writing on the sign grey-and-fuzzy posted in the window of the bar was nothing like the writing in Cerebus' prime ministerial treatise on government. To that I had the following comments: we have now seen (and heard from Astoria) how Cerebus' mere presence can make possible the otherwise impossible. Perhaps the things he makes possible vary with the role he sees himself fulfilling at any given time. If that were true, then perhaps his nature itself changes (relatively) depending on that role, so as prime minister he would be able to write in the way he thinks a prime minister would write, but as a bartender he would be able to write in the way he would conceive of a bartender writing. If true, that would mean yet another read through the "phone books." But it would also be an interesting comment on us all, as people often constrain themselves by thinking that they fill a certain role and that people in that role can only do certain things, which is usually only partly true. The point being to think about how to change the nature of the role itself, something Cerebus is very bad at, usually only being able to become the most extreme example of the common wisdom concerning the nature of the role.

Well, I think those are most of the *Cerebus* comments I have been saving up for a while. I am sorry that you seem to have given up all convention appearances. Are they really that sullying/distracting?

Also, I enjoyed the discussion with Alan Moore. Not enough of that around the industry generally. Indeed, that's why I think you should have gone ahead and done a more detailed review of *Sandman* (though what you did write was intriguing, even if I didn't completely agree with it all).

So, I hope you are well and that things (life) are proceeding satisfactorily. Best to Gerhard and Diana Schutz.

I'll try to make it less than a year next time.

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I did recognize your name when the letter came in this morning. For some reason I thought you were part of the diminishing coterie of naysayers and was pleasantly surprised to discover that that wasn't the case. The California return address led me astray perhaps.

Of course yours is just the sort of letter which appeals to my vanity — what author wouldn't be pleased to the very core by someone who really, really gets it? Since my vanity is very narrowly confined by the chains and prison walls I have constructed for it over the last two decades (even as my vanity exclaims, "He gets it! He really gets it!" my internalized jailer cracks old vanity a good one with his nightstick: "He's only one person. Approval is a distraction. Only the weak need approval." Fun guy that jailer, eh?) and tends, consequently, towards undernourishment, many thanks (on vanity's behalf) for sending him a filing cabinet with a few wee cakes in the drawers.

Most particularly, thank you for passing along the fact that someone noticed that the tavern hours sign that Cerebus made up was in a different hand. It was one of those things that I put in for myself, never daring to imagine that anyone would notice. And your own inter-

pretation of my motivation is a lot closer than I imagined anyone would "get." I was doing the lettering for that page and when I got to the sign, a little voice in my head went: "Get Gerhard to ink that lettering." It was a trustable little voice (unlike some), and as I worked away on the rest of the page, I saw how appropriate it was in the context, reflecting Cerebus' greater link to the tavern in his choice to become the bartender rather than leave. Because I pencilled the lettering and Gerhard inked it, it reflected a merging of Cerebus as a character with his environment (and represented the first time in the course of the story line that Cerebus has had his own environment — as opposed to Rick and Jaka's *apartment,* Dino's *Cafe — since the hotel in the first part of* Church & State, *and the first time he has had a home of his own which he didn't share with underlings, hirelings, or family. Even the Ambassador Suite in* High Society *had the Regency Elf which, in retrospect, is a delicious irony that makes me shake my head and smile). It became even more fun when Gerhard finished the page and I noticed that I had failed in my original intention to tightly pencil the lettering, with the result that there was more "Ger" than "Dave" to it, more tavern than Cerebus, which was very true to the direction the story was (and is) going. The fact that I inwardly resisted the notion that there was more tavern than Cerebus to the story line – resisted it on Cerebus' behalf (I know it doesn't look that way, but I do* try *to be in the little gray bastard's corner where possible) — eventually blossomed into a sequence in the next issue where Cerebus is forced to confront the conundrum of whether becoming a bartender/manager constitutes a "step up" from being a customer. Emerged or* submerged? *I knew that it would play a large part in* Guys *and* Rick's Story, *so I foreshadowed it in* Women *(trade paperback pages 194-195, 206, and 208) with Swoon — little realizing at the time how large a part it* would *play!*

So, again, many thanks for passing along word that the tavern hours sign wasn't the sound of one hand clapping.

As to your question about conventions being 'sullying/distracting": I'm not sure that either term is accurate. My best estimation (and your observation on the e-mail arriviste *touching off another trot along the feminist rhetoric pathways now worn deep as foxholes would seem to confirm it) is that there is simply no place for me at conventions or, for that matter, in society itself as it has configured itself. As you say, "no one seems to want to discuss these things," and in my view you are exactly right. So it seems pointless to me to go to conventions which in my view are no better than the society in which they exist. Why should I fly across the continent to* not *discuss things when I can stay home and attempt to put some sensible view of gender, society, and reality-as-I-perceive-it down on paper with as much verisimilitude as I am capable of bringing to bear upon it? It also seems the best of all possible worlds to leave conventions and society to tread the well-trodden foxholes of rhetorical feminism since they find any kind of dissent so troubling. And they find the cacophonous expression of platitudes, emotions, feelings, and anecdotal evidence so (what is their peculiar word for it? Ah!) Empowering.*

If rhetorical feminism constituted a political movement, an ideology, or even a viewpoint, I suppose I could see some benefit in imposing myself on their collectivist shindigs — like a piece of grit in the soft tissues of an oyster, with a hope (however remote) that some manner of pearl might result — but, Sky, my friend, my conclusion is inescapable: the reason "no one seems to want to discuss these things" is because rhetorical feminism has nothing to say beyond what it has already said. Any attempt to raise the discussion out of the foxholes and trenches of the cacophonous expression of platitudes, emotions, feelings, and anecdotal evidence is doomed to failure since the only place it can exist — being founded on nothing beyond its good opinion of itself — is in those foxholes and trenches. To attempt to locate (by inquiry) some manner of political movement, some manner of ideology, or some manner of viewpoint causes offense and elicits the only crumbling defenses left to rhetorical feminism: "I think we have to stop talking about this," "I think you're a pig," "Why do you hate women so much?" "I can't go there," "Let's just drop it," et al.

So the odds that you and I will ever have a chance to chat at the San Diego Con (let's say) are so astronomically remote as to be beyond human reckoning. Simply put, it would seem to me to be a pointless exercise to inflict myself on that environment or subject myself to its peculiarities when weighed in the balance against producing my part of the last five pages of issue 223 (what I accomplished within the time span of this year's San Diego Con).

Considering how gratifying vanity found your letter, let's pretend that you and my vanity are holding up the bar at the Doubletree around midnight or so. I'm on my third Heineken, and the American-sized shot of Jack Daniels I just chugged down is bringing on one of my spells of lugubriousness (since the jailer always passes out before vanity does). And you ask me something. What do you ask me? Hmm. You ask me... ah!

We've just been talking about the "dialogue: From Hell*" that I did with Alan. And you've just remembered that I talked about having read the Bible from cover to cover for the first time. And you ask me, "Is there anything you would change about issue 186 now that you've read the Bible?"*

Gathering and ordering my thoughts, I light a cigarette. I know, I know — you can't smoke in the bar at the Doubletree, but we're just pretending.

"Off the top of my head, I would've changed Reason to Wisdom. That is, the core of the piece, which you rightly saw as being 'Emotion vs. Reason' has much greater validity if it is 'Emotion vs. Wisdom.' In my view, and let me say right off the mark that all of this is just 'my view' in case I don't remember to say it in front of every opinion while I'm answering you... in my view (where was I? Ah.), in my view, Wisdom supersedes Reason almost to the same degree that Reason supersedes Emotion. Since I've read the Bible I've started separating my perceptions into those that I think qualify as reasonable and those that I consider wise. Reading the Bible gave me an appreciation of how limited Reason is — and how limiting.

"You have only to look at how many un-Reasonable

things were done during the Age of Reason to develop a snicker in your voice whenever you say 'the Age of Reason.' Reason, it seems to me, makes things like fascism and communism possible — something that Wisdom wouldn't allow. Reason works well on paper. The foundation of communism — 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' — is very Reasonable. It just isn't very Wise. Wisdom would ask, 'What about human greed? What about the power which manifests itself wherever there is the greatest concentration of wealth and resources? What power are you going to have to counterbalance and check the power of whoever controls the concentration of wealth and resources?' Because Reason has no Reasonable answer for those questions, the system is doomed to failure. The Constitution of the United States of America is Wise, Das Kapital *is Reasonable. Reason degenerates too easily into pragmatism. 'You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs,' 'We like what works,' which leaves aside questions of right and wrong. K.B. Clark's quote comes to mind: 'Men of power have no time or inclination to deal with... social morality.' As this century is coming to a close, and in light of what I read in the Bible, it is not hard to see why men of Reason find themselves in such a quagmire — it was their Reason and its exact distance from Wisdom which created it. Reason presupposes that there is nothing left to learn; it puts its faith in technologies, in wealth, in itself. Very much like Emotion, which puts its faith in families, in love, and in itself to the exclusion of all else — and unWisely seeks to outlaw, exclude, and ignore anything which causes it distress of any proportion. The Treaty of Versailles was a Reasonable document but very, very unWise. Lacking the least basics of human compassion, it created Hitler, and Hitler brought about the destruction of the Empires of its architects: men of Reason, one and all.*

"At the time that I wrote 186, I deplored the excesses of political correctness, the fact that it had nothing to say but insisted on continuing to shriek its fatuous platitudes to the exclusion of anything I perceived as meaningful. I still do. It was only in reading the Bible that I could see the analogy — whether you see the stories as metaphorical or historically factual I don't believe affects the observation — between the scattering of the Tribes of Israel at each juncture where they separate themselves from God and place their faith in wealth and power, military strength, abundance, their wives, their kids, and the undercurrents of the sensibility which informed 186. Since I knew the piece hadn't a snowball's chance in hell of finding a receptive audience anywhere, I was either talking to myself or crying, 'How long, Lord? How long?'

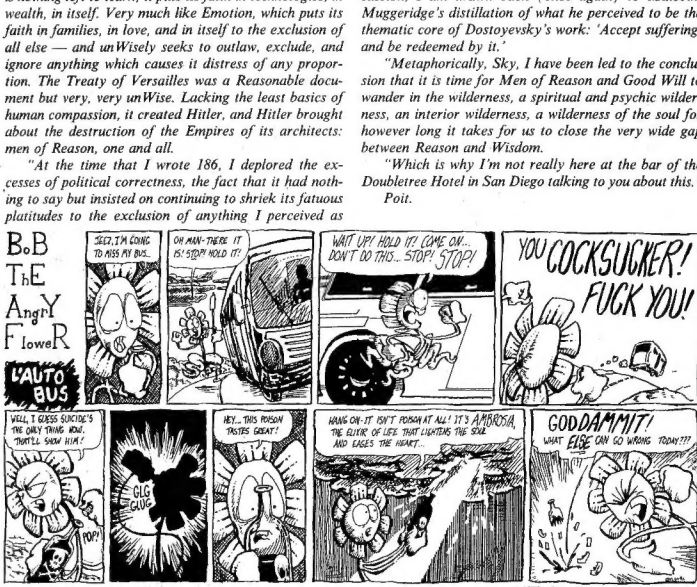
"Since Oprah and Jerry Springer and Camille Paglia show no signs of running out of gas anytime soon, I've come to the conclusion that to ask the question (of the Lord or of anyone else, for that matter) is premature in the extreme and — given the history of the pragmatism-which-misperceived-itself-as-Reason in this century alone — how could I fail to see the appropriateness of the repercussion (not punishment, repercussion) of the gender opposite rising to preeminence and confounding sequential, reasonable argument at every turn with 'I think we have to stop talking about this,' 'I think you're a pig,' 'Why do you hate women so much?' 'I can't go there,' and 'Let's just drop it.'

"And having seen the appropriateness of the repercussion, I am drawn back (once again) to Malcolm Muggeridge's distillation of what he perceived to be the thematic core of Dostoyevsky's work: 'Accept suffering, and be redeemed by it.'

"Metaphorically, Sky, I have been led to the conclusion that it is time for Men of Reason and Good Will to wander in the wilderness, a spiritual and psychic wilderness, an interior wilderness, a wilderness of the soul for however long it takes for us to close the very wide gap between Reason and Wisdom.

"Which is why I'm not really here at the bar of the Doubletree Hotel in San Diego talking to you about this."

Poit.


BoB ThE AngrY FlowerR
L'AUTO BUS
SECT, I'M GOING TO MISS MY BUS.
OH MAN- THERE IT IS! STOP! HOLD IT!
WAIT UP! HOLD IT! COME ON... DON'T DO THIS... STOP! STOP!
YOU COCKSUCKER! FUCK YOU!
WELL, I GUESS SUICIDE'S THE ONLY THING NOW. THAT'LL SHOW HIM!
POP!
GLG GLUG
HEY... THIS POISON TASTES GREAT!
WAIT ON- IT ISN'T POISON AT ALL! IT'S AMBROSIA, THE ELIXIR OF LIFE THAT LIGHTENS THE SOUL AND EASES THE HEART...
GODDAMMIT! WHAT ELSE CAN GO WRONG TODAY???

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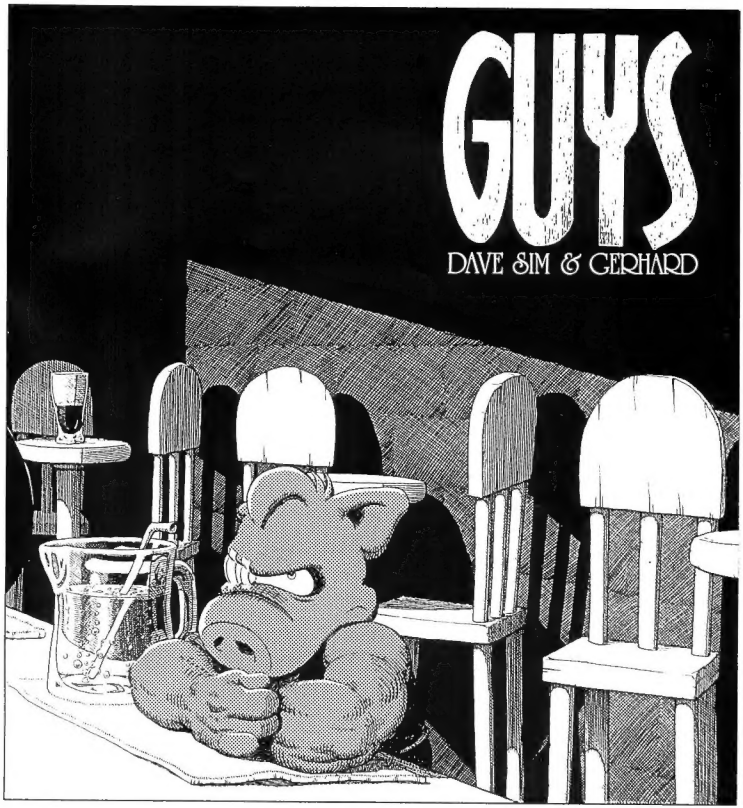

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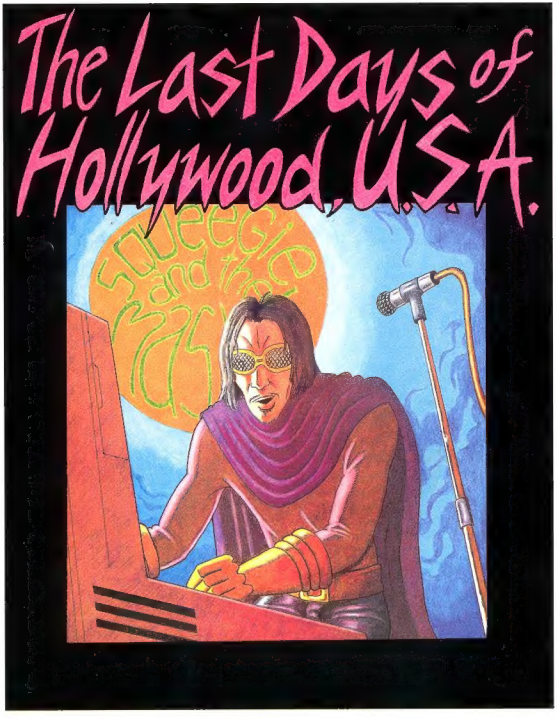

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